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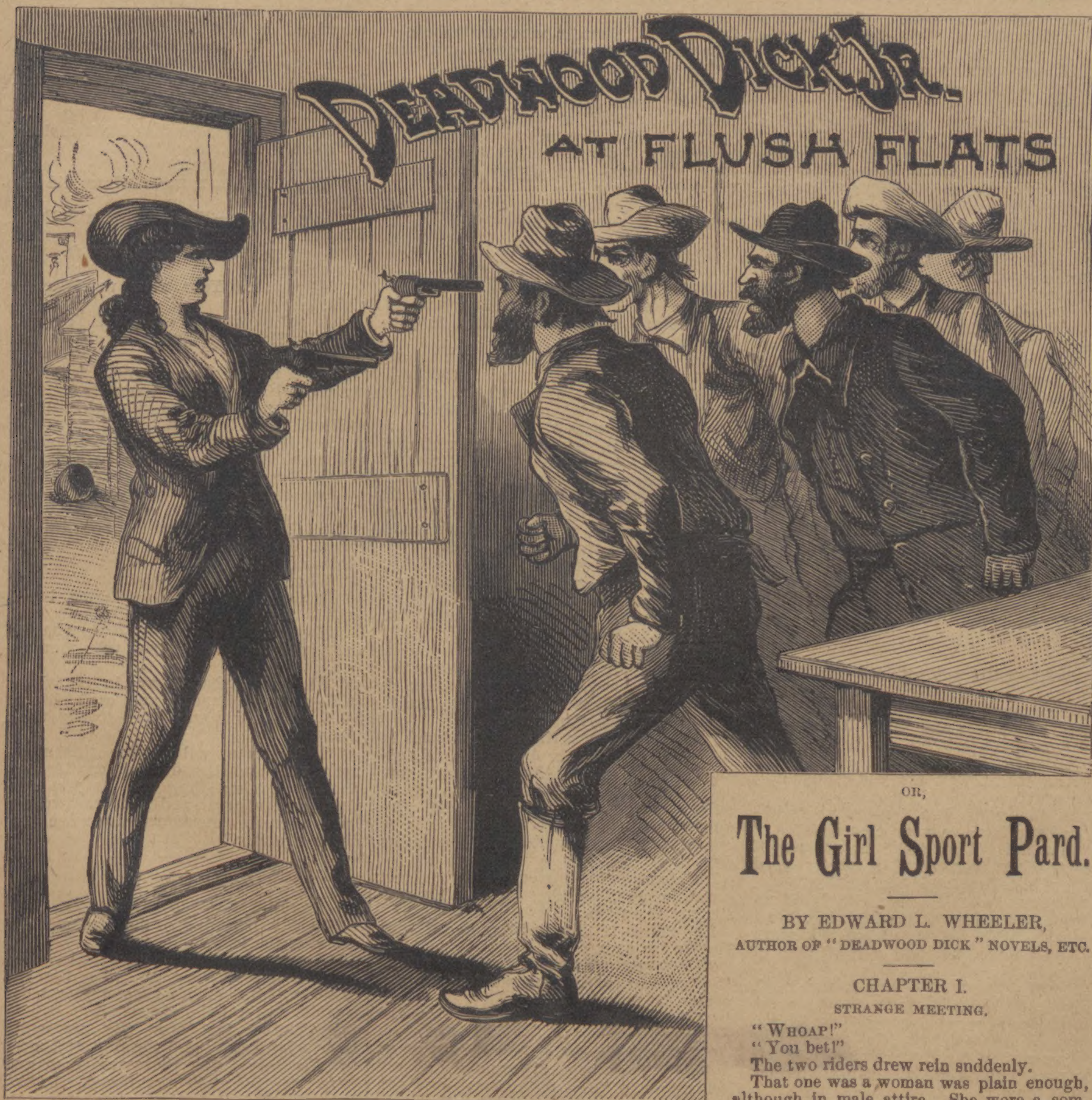
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OR,

The Girl Sport Pard.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

STRANGE MEETING.

"WHOAP!"

"You bet!"

The two riders drew rein suddenly.

That one was a woman was plain enough, although in male attire. She wore a sombrero, from under which her dark, curling

"WHOAP!" CRIED THE GIRL SPORT. "HOLD ON A MINUTE, MY PRETTY HYENAS!"

hair fell in a splendid mass upon her shoulders.

She was a beauty, with dark-tinted skin, regular features and peerless eyes. She was riding astride, and wore a natty suit, the vest low-cut, and the coat richly bound. She had whipped a revolver from the inside of her coat, and held it ready for business.

And the man—he was a good-looking fellow, under thirty, with dark hair and mustache and keen, magnetic eyes. He was clad after the manner of a sport, wearing seal velvet, a white felt hat, and patent leathers. He, too, had produced a popper, but had no use for it, as he saw the moment his eyes met those of the handsome girl sport.

Immediately he thrust his weapon out of sight and lifted his hat.

"Allow me to offer apology," he said, gallantly, "but I could not, of course, know what manner of person I was about to confront."

"No apology necessary, sir," with a merry laugh that displayed twin rows of the pearliest teeth, and the girl returned her own weapon to its place. "We were both ready for business, that was all."

The scene is laid at the bottom of a wild, rugged gulch.

Two trails, from different directions, here converge into one, with a point of rocks separating them, and along these trails the two riders had come.

By strange coincidence the two horses had appeared at precisely the same time, neck and neck, and, acting upon impulse, each of the riders had prepared to interchange introductions of a forceful character.

"And whom have I the honor of addressing?" the man asked.

"Well, my name is Nancy Jane, but I am called Nobby Nancy, just for short. Who are you?"

"Nobby Nancy, eh? It is a name that fits you well, anyhow. My own title is Peters, surnamed Simon, but better known, where I'm known at all, as Simon Pure, the Peculiar."

Nobby Nancy laughed a merry, ringing laugh.

"It is a peculiar name," she declared. "Which way are you traveling, Mr. Peters?"

"In the same direction as yourself, it seems, Miss Jane."

"Oh! don't call me miss—please don't! Mr. Peters. Bring it right out, Nancy Jane."

"And I would prefer to call you Nobby Nancy, if I may. Moreover, I must request you not to put on any trimmings when you address me; just call me Simon and done with it."

"All right, Simon!"

"And which way are you going, if I may ask?"

"In the same direction as yourself—to pay you back in your own coin."

"Ha, ha! Well, there is no use of our fencing; you seem a pretty good sort of a fellow, and I'm another."

"You are a jovial blade, I opine!" remarked the girl sport, nonchalantly, "and I rather cotton to you. I am silk warp and all-wool filling, and a good sort of person to tie to."

"I believe you, and here is my hand, if you will deign to take it. I am another, if you are willing to believe it, and I should like to have the pleasure of your company for the remainder of our journey. I think we will make a pretty strong team."

"I am willing, certainly—in fact, a little more than willing, to confess the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"I have reason to believe there is danger for me on this trail."

"Indeed! Then there is every reason why we should continue on our journey in company, my fair Nobby Nancy."

"Ha, ha! I fail to see where you find anything fair about me, for I am as dark as sun and wind can make me. But, we won't discuss that. I am ready to jog along if you are."

"To what particular place are you going?" the man asked.

"I am heading for Flush Flats, which, I take it, is your destination as well."

"Yes, it is; and I hope we'll have opportunity to become better acquainted during our sojourn there. Have you any idea what kind of a place it is?"

"I have not. You, then, are a stranger there?"

"Yes. I have never seen the place in my life, and only heard of it a short time ago."

"The same with me; and, what is strange, I don't know why I am going there, now. That is what makes me a little suspicious, you see, and I am glad to have company."

"Strange coincidence!" exclaimed the man. "That is almost my own case, exactly. I'll tell you what it is, Nobby Nancy. I think it would be a good thing for us to pool our piles in this game, and share the risks and divide the spoils. What do you say?"

"It is a bargain!" assented the girl sport, offering her hand.

CHAPTER II.

HINTS OF A CRIME.

Flush Flats was a flush place.

It was one of the biggest camps in all that section, and was important in proportion.

And, the biggest and most consequential man in the town was one Richard Rashton, president and manager of the Dauphin Mine, president also of the local bank, and also mayor.

He was, as it were, a sort of veritable Poo Bah in the community, and it was no small community, either. The population was considerable, and while the place still retained the old name, yet there was a movement on foot to have the town made into a city and the name changed.

Rashton was some fifty years of age, big, portly, with iron gray hair and close cropped beard.

He was strictly a man of business, first and last and all the time.

In truth, he was nothing else.

On this morning, which witnesses the opening of our story, he was sitting in his private office in the bank, which looked out upon the street.

Just opposite was the largest hotel in the place, the Fifth Avenue Hotel, so-called. The street, by the way, was called Fifth Avenue, although it was the only avenue the town could boast. Inquiring strangers were told that it was expected the town would have more some day.

Rashton was looking out upon the street scene, when something claimed his particular attention.

He called to his cashier, one Henry Hurdle by name.

"I'll wager a sixpence that's our man!" the president exclaimed, pointing out the person he meant.

"Oh, no; not he!" the cashier disagreed.

"Put on your hat and find out. Do so quietly. They have dismounted and are going to stop there at the hotel, and you can see what name he registers."

The cashier hurried away, and the president continued looking out of the window.

"Yes, I'll bet it is he!" he said to himself. "He looks like a keen one, even if he is in flash attire and seemingly a sport. I'll wager that he is our man, two to one!"

The persons who had claimed attention were two new arrivals, a man and a woman.

The man was clad in seal velvet, white felt hat and patent leathers, while the woman wore male attire. More particular description is needless, since we have seen them before.

When they had dismounted, the man called a bystander to take charge of their horses, tossing him a yellow-tinted tip, and by the time the cashier crossed the street, the man and woman had mounted the steps and entered the house.

The woman had passed in by the hall door, while the man entered the door over which was the word "Office," although it was so near a neighbor to the bar-room that there was scarcely a distinction.

Hurdle followed the man, with the crowd of curious idlers always to be found standing around such places.

He was gone for some time, and when he appeared, he recrossed the street and re-entered the president's office.

"Well?" the president asked.

"You were mistaken," said the cashier.

"Not the man, then?"

"No, not the man."

"What is his name? How did he register?"

"Why, simply—'Simon Peters and Pard, Pilgrims.'"

"A strange name, sure enough. I'm not convinced."

"Why not? Your man would come right here."

"No telling what Deadwood Dick would do, Hurdle; no telling what he would do."

"Well, there is one way to find out; wait for him to make the advance. If he is our man, there is no doubt but he will call this afternoon."

"Yes, if he is the man, which I am not prepared to believe. He does not look as I fancy Deadwood Dick looks. He impresses me as being a card sharp."

"And how about the woman?"

"Not likely, either, that she is the one we want—which makes me most doubt the man."

"What are they to each other?"

"Pards, the man has set down, but I take it they are man and wife."

"Maybe you are right; but what is their game? What do you take them to be?"

"Why, just what I have intimated, or said—a pair of sports and card sharps, who made their way here to ply their trade."

"Well, you may be right; this afternoon will probably determine. If they don't call, then they are, as you suspect, card sharps, and not the two we have secretly summoned to solve the death mystery."

CHAPTER III.

UNEXPECTED EXCITEMENT.

The day passed and the stranger did not visit the bank.

He was seen about town a little, some of the time in company with the girl in male attire, and they sat together for a while on the hotel piazza.

Speculation had been rife respecting their relationship, and the first and most popular guess, that they were man and wife, was by night abandoned. It had been decided that they were only casual friends.

Or, possibly, as some suggested, brother and sister.

They had separate rooms at the hotel, which fact in itself had practically settled the first surmise.

Their names had now become known throughout the camp, and were upon every lip, for they were certainly a couple to attract attention. Great was the curiosity to know more about them.

At the time of the closing of the bank for the day, Cashier Hurdle remarked to Mr. Rashton:

"Well, you think now that he is not the man?"

"Yes, I am forced to think so."

The leading place of amusement in Flush Flats was the Odeon, which was something in the way of a saloon and playhouse combined—being a long hall, the front part fitted with bar and tables, and the rear half divided off and fitted with seats, on a sloping floor, with a fairly commodious stage at the far end.

This place was open night and day, and from eight o'clock in the evening until midnight there was a continuous performance; the rest of the time the bar was the only attraction.

It was about that time of the evening—eight o'clock on the evening of the day of which we write, that Simon Peters and his pard entered the Odeon, as if to while away a pleasant hour.

As the performance on the stage was about to commence, and the crowd was filling the chairs, they, too, passed through and took seats in a favorable location, to immediately become the center of attraction, every pair of eyes being turned upon them—which did not in the least disconcert or annoy them.

The curtain was rung up, to a variety performance, the first thing on the programme being a song by one "Star Sterling."

The curtain rose to a great clapping of hands, indicative that the singer was known and popular.

The music struck up, and, in a moment, the singer tripped lightly out upon the boards and made her bow.

As she did so, Simon Pure noticed that his sport pard gave a start.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I think I know her, and if she is the person I take her to be she is no friend of mine."

"Indeed! But I do not imagine that she is your enemy to a dangerous extent. She does not look like a very vengeful sort of person, truly."

"I cannot say; but, one thing I do know and that is that I must have an interview with her, as soon as convenient, and if she knows anything about my missing lover, she shall tell me!"

She spoke low, of course, and no one but her companion could hear.

The singer had begun her song.

"You fill me with interest," exclaimed Simon Pure. "You did not tell me about this, Nobby Nancy."

"Well, no, I did not; why should I? You withhold some things from me, so we are even."

"And stand in our own light by so doing. I have been thinking that it will be better if we confide fully in each other, for I have now seen enough of you to satisfy me."

"The same thought has come to me."

"We will leave here early, then, and have an earnest talk. Say no more now, for this is no place to—Ha! she sees you!"

The singer had stopped suddenly short in her song, and was gazing staringly at Nobby Nancy.

Everybody was filled with surprise at the sudden stopping of the song, and the music stopping too, all eyes followed

the direction of her gaze, to rest upon Nobby Nancy.

This for a moment; then, with a sudden movement, the singer leaped from the stage to the floor, and ran up the aisle.

She whipped out a pistol as she advanced, seeing which, Nobby Nancy did the same and sprang to her feet to meet her, thus getting "the drop."

"Stop, or I will stop you!" cried the girl sport, ringingly.

The singer obeyed, but had come to within three yards of her rival—for such, apparently, Nobby Nancy had been, or then was. The general crowd was, in an instant, all excitement, and every one was amazed—curious, too, to know what it all meant.

"I want to know where he is!" the singer demanded, her handsome face flushing red in anger and hate.

"Just the question I wanted to ask of you," responded the girl sport. "I do not know, and it is apparent that you do not. We are still even, it is evident."

Nobby Nancy was much the cooler and calmer of the two.

"Are you speaking the truth?" demanded the singer.

"Yes, I am speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Well, I am forced to believe you, but if I find that you have told me a lie, the worse for you."

"No occasion for me to lie. I would not be afraid to tell you the truth, if I did know where—where he is. You had better get back and finish your song."

The manager of the hall was hurrying up, other performers were already on the stage, and the singer was told to get behind the scenes.

"And you," and the manager turned roughly to Nobby Nancy, "you had better get out of here."

"And you had better attend to your own business!" spoke up Simon Pure, in clear and ringing tones. "My pard was not to blame for this little break in the performance, Mister Man."

"I don't care; I order her to get out of here; do you understand? And you along with her, too! Come, now, no fooling! Git up and git or I will fetch you out of that seat by the roots! See?"

"We paid our admission to this part of the house; we have done nothing out of order, and we are going to stay here just as long as we please! Do you see?"

The man had gone so far that he could not well "take water" now, so made a reach for Simon and laid a hand on his collar, with the intention of carrying out his promise. He certainly looked to be able to do it, and as Simon sat next to the aisle, it looked like an easy job for the Odeon man.

But the trick did not work as the manager had intended, for Simon was up with a suddenness that amazed him, and something else amazed him a good deal more; an iron-like fist was planted squarely between his eyes, and headlong down the aisle plunged the manager in the direction of the stage.

The crowd broke out with a ringing round of applause.

Not a man in the place was in sympathy with the manager, for he had more foes than friends in that crowd.

His name was Sanford Mainard, and being big and strong, with some knowledge of the fistic art, he had ruled order in his hall with an iron hand.

Hence it did the crowd good to see him get such a "winder," but at the same time everybody knew that he would only be the worse when he got upon his feet.

Friendly voices, therefore, called out to Simon to look out for himself, which Simon was evidently prepared to do.

CHAPTER IV.

NANCY JANE'S STORY.

It looked as if there might be a jubilee.

Half the men in the hall were upon their feet by the time Mainard got upon his, and many of them had their hands behind them, where they carried their guns. That they were prepared to make things lively was not to be doubted.

"Sit down, gentlemen! Sit down!" called out Simon Pure, very calmly. "There is no need for any undue excitement here. I can take care of myself, I think, and if not, this gentleman will take care of me!"

"You are right I will!" cried Mainard, making for him. "No man ever struck me like that and lived."

"He'll kill you!" whispered Nobby Nancy, in alarm.

"No he won't. Be calm."

Simon was on his feet still, with one hand resting on the back of the seat, and he eyed the big man calmly.

There was something in that magnetic eye-flash that brought the proprietor to a stop before he came within touching distance, but he pulled a gun and leveled it.

"I order you out of here!" he commanded, sternly.

"And I refuse to go. I have paid my admission; I have done nothing out of order, and you cannot put me out. Put up your gun, for if you were to murder me, this crowd would perforate you in a manner that would give your undertaker a bad job to put you in a box."

There was more truth than poetry about that, as Mainard perfectly well understood.

"If it were not for interrupting the performance, I'd show you what I'd do," he snarled.

"And I assure you that the performance might be permanently interrupted, if it depends on your active personal service, sir," was the cool and easy retort. "Take the wiser course, and go back to your business!"

"I may see you again, unless you sneak out of town unawares," growled the manager, thrusting his weapon back into his pocket and turning toward the stage.

"As I am not doing the sneak act, you will have all the opportunity you can desire."

Simon sat down amidst a thunder of applause.

The music struck up again, the performers took up their parts, and things moved along smoothly once more.

"Who would have thought we'd get into such a broil here?" observed Nobby Nancy, speaking in a low tone to her companion. "I thought you were done for, Simon, sure enough."

"Not by a fellow of that stripe, you will find. I'm glad I had to serve him no worse."

"Shall we go out?"

"No; we'll stay an hour or so, just to prove that we are in no haste, and then we'll return to the hotel."

So they gave their attention to the performance, and nothing further came to pass to make things uncomfortable.

Finally, after they had remained something over an hour, they arose, at the end of one of the performances, and made their way quietly out, the men in the place making way for them.

"It looks as if there might be trouble ahead for us," remarked Nobby Nancy, as they proceeded toward the hotel, "and I must look out for Maud Weille—"

"That is her real name, eh?"

"Yes; Star Sterling is only a stage name. I have got to look out for her, and you have made an enemy of her manager."

"That for him!" with a snap of the fingers. "He won't bother me, I guess. But, you think there is danger to you from the girl?"

"I cannot tell. She may think that I have fibbed to her, and in that case she may try to cut up a little. But, I think I can hold my own against her, unless the man chips in with her."

"And in that case he will buck up against me," calmly.

"I thank you. And now, we were to have a plain talk, I believe," as they took seats upon the end of the hotel piazza.

They settled down in their chairs, and Simon placed his feet up on the railing and lighted a cigar. It was a charming evening, and a delightful place to spend a quiet hour before retiring.

"Now I am ready," advised Simon, complacently.

"Well, I will first of all tell you my real name, which is Jennie James. I am no relation to Jesse, however, that I am aware of," laughing.

"I can believe that."

"About as far as we have confided in each other has been to say that we have both been sent for to come to this town of Flush Flats, and that Richard Rashton is the man who wants to see us."

"That is correct."

"What he wants to see me for I cannot imagine, and you have said that you do not know what he wants of you. By your advice I have agreed to keep quiet for a day or two, until you take a survey of the ground, before we make ourselves known to him. Are you willing, now, to tell me your real name, sir?"

"My name is Richard M. Bristol, better known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

The young woman uttered a low cry, and caught hold of Dick's arm with a sudden clutch, saying:

"Is it possible? You are the one person I have been longing to meet, for I am sure that you, if anybody, can find my missing lover for me. Oh, say that you will!"

"Why, certainly. I will do whatever is possible in that direction, Miss James, believe me."

"Oh! I am so glad! Now we understand each other."

"I hope we do. But, your story?"

"Yes, I will tell you; I can tell everything freely and fully, for I would keep nothing back from you, knowing who you are."

"But, in truth, there is not much to tell. The man I am seeking is named Theodore Barefield. We are all from St. Paul—he, I, and this girl, who was my rival, and also another man named Eugene Brandon, who was my lover's rival for my hand."

"Rather complicated."

"It looks so, at first glance. I and Maud both loved Theodore, and he and Eugene both loved me. Each vowed that he would possess me, but that was impossible, since I loved only Theodore, or Dory, as I called him. We tried to bring about a match between Eugene and Maud, but it was no go."

"That would have righted matters speedily."

"But there was a fortune in the way. I am quite rich, in my own right, and I firmly believe that Eugene thought just a little more of my money than he did of me. And, too, it stood doubly in the way, for Dory would not accept me until he had made a fortune of his own, which he came down here to do, something more than five years ago, and I have never heard from him since."

"Which would seem to show that he has not made the fortune yet," suggested Dick.

"I am more of the opinion that some

harm has befallen him," declared the girl; "and the more so because Eugene left home about six months after Dory departed. He was gone a year, then he came back and asked me once again to wed him, and when I refused he left home a second time, saying that life had no charms for him, and that he would go and bury himself where no one knew him. He might, however, he said, come back yet once more to ask again."

"You asked him, of course, if he had seen Dory?"

"Certainly; but he declared that he had not seen him. However, I did not believe him, and neither did Maud, and we both decided to set out to find him, though not in company, you may be sure. And we did set out. I have means to carry me, while she has to earn her living as she goes along, and you have seen the way she is doing it. Not that I say a word against her for that; she is good and honest, far as I know; but she can never win my lover from me, even should she be the first one to find him. And that is my whole story, Mr. Bristol."

CHAPTER V.

RIVALS' PLEDGES.

Deadwood Dick had listened with a good deal of interest.

It was but a simple story, as the girl had declared, yet it was one fraught with suggestions.

"Well, we may find your lover living, and I hope we shall," said Dick, at the close, "but I must think the chances are against it, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"He may have thought less of you than you think he did."

"Oh, no; I will not believe that of him, Mr. Bristol. He was as good and as true as gold, and he loved me dearly."

"Do you think that the other man, Eugene, would be evil enough at heart to murder him, if the chance offered? That is a terrible thing to think, but murders are not rare in this yet half-wild region."

"It is so terrible that I will not allow myself to believe it of him; but, all the same, it is possible. Indeed, I cannot help but believe that he has had something to do with the case that has kept Dory absent and silent all these years. Perhaps he has lied to him about me, and so made him decide never to return, thinking me false and unworthy."

"I hardly think that, because Dory, as you call him, would distrust anything that his rival might tell him, and would be likely to investigate for himself, would he not?"

"Yes; unless Eugene had false information reach him in some other manner than by his own lips, and in a way that would carry conviction with it. He might do that, you know."

"He might, possibly, try such subterfuge, but even that would imply that your lover had doubted you, and I am sure you will give him credit for having had implicit faith in you, will you not?"

"Yes, yes; for I promised him so faithfully that I would remain true to him, and wait for his return; but, I did beg him to write to me, no matter where he was, so that I might know where he was and how making out."

"Something has happened to him, that is pretty evident."

"I have a hope, but it is so wild that I scarcely dare call it such, and that is—"

"Is what?"

"This Mr. Rashton is a banker, and it is possible that Dory has funds with him and has asked him to send for me, in order to give me a glad surprise. I am impatient, but I have been guided by you—"

"Do not hope too strongly, Miss James. Where thousands seek fortunes, only one in a thousand finds the prize. Still, if you do not know this man Rashton, and you have assured me that you do not, it may be something in connection with your lover that has led him to send for you."

"I am so eager to know!"

"We will visit him on the morrow and learn. But, be prepared for news the worst, is my advice."

"Then you know something?" eagerly.

"Not a thing."

"Then, what do you mean?"

"Why, simply that if your lover were alive, or, at any rate, at liberty, would he not have communicated with you himself and not have delegated another?"

"It looks so."

"Where were you addressed by Rashton?"

"At home—that is, St. Paul."

"And your letter was forwarded to you?"

"Yes; I have kept in touch with home all the time of my wanderings."

"And you came in this direction immediately upon receipt of it. Now I get the hang of the thing."

"But, it is all a mystery, and it must remain so until we have seen this Mr. Rashton and learned what he has to say. But, may I ask questions?"

"As many as you like."

"Did he send for you as Deadwood Dick?"

"He did."

"Then it must be that he wants something in the way of detective work, I should imagine."

"That is what I think, and that is the reason I am remaining incog. for a time. I want to look around before I let him know who I am."

"And what have you been able to find out?"

"Nothing. There is no mystery abroad in the land, as far as I am able to find, and I don't know what he can want."

"Well, Mr. Bristol, one question more: Do you still care to have me for your pard?"

"Why, certainly. What leads you to ask such a question as that?"

"Why, knowing who you are, I do not feel that I can be of any use to you, but rather that I am more likely to prove in the way—"

"Never mind that; you are still my pard for this game. We must stick together, since we are in the same boat, so to say—that is, since we have both been mysteriously sent for."

"Well, I will obey you in everything."

"If you will do that I think you can help the game along amazingly. And, if anything should go wrong with me, you will have to play your hand alone, and do my part as well as your own at the same time."

"And now about visiting Mr. Rashton. Suppose I visit him at the bank, and you send for him to call on you here at the hotel. That will fix it so that he can speak his mind to each, and we can compare notes afterward."

"I am willing to be guided by what you think best, for I know I can trust you implicitly."

"Then let it be so understood, and—Ah! whom have we here?"

A woman was approaching.

The night was not dark, and even had it been, the street was brilliantly illuminated.

The woman in question had come from the direction of the Odeon, and Dick was not wrong in a guess that it was the singer Star Sterling.

She came up the steps and advanced to where they sat.

"Is it you, Jennie?" she asked.

"Yes, Maud."

"And this gentleman?"

"Is Mr. Peters, a friend of mine."

"You need not introduce me. I did not come for that. But I want to ask you once more if—"

"I told you the solemn truth before, and there is nothing more that I can tell you now. I hope you will take my word for it."

"Then there is something that I want to ask besides."

"What is it?"

"If you find Dory, will you tell me? If I find him, I will tell you."

"Well, I will agree to that, Maud, though you ought to know that it can do you little good. He cared only for me."

"And I cared only for him. It will do this much good, that we need not go on looking in vain, after one has found him, dead or alive, and it will be fair to both."

"Well, all right; I will let you know when I have found him. By the way, do you know anything of Eugene Brandon?"

"I do not, and never want to— But, that is not true."

"What is not true?"

"That I never want to know anything of him, for I do. I am looking for him as well as for Dory."

"And what for?"

"Simple reason. Because I suspect him, as do you."

"I need not have asked, had I thought."

"Well, beyond this agreement we remain bitter foes; for, had it not been for you, I might now have been Dory Barefield's happy wife, and I hate you for it!"

"I have not the same feeling against you, Maud, though I will admit that I have little love for you. If that is all you have to say, I will not detain you, for Mr. Peters and I were talking over matters of business. I will bid you good-night!"

But the other had turned and was going off, without even so much as that formal "good-evening!"

CHAPTER VI.

DICK AT THE BANK.

The following forenoon Deadwood Dick entered the bank, still in his character of Simon Pure, and he noted that the cashier eyed him sharply when he approached his window.

"Is Mr. Rashton in his office?" the caller asked.

"Yes, he is in."

"I want to see him."

"What name, please?"

"Simon Peters."

The cashier stepped to the door of the private office, where Dick heard him announce the name, without comment.

"Show him right in!" Dick heard the president order, but he could not see the brightened look that came over his face nor the wink he gave the cashier, as if to add, "What did I tell you?"

"This way, sir," and the cashier opened a gate in the railing. "Step right in, sir." Dick, hat in hand, entered the private office.

Mr. Rashton wheeled in his chair to greet him, and waved his hand to a chair.

"I do not recall your name as one that I have heard before, Mr. Peters. I think you are a stranger to me."

"I am here at your bidding, sir."

"Ah! Then you are—"

"Whom did you expect?"

"Well, I have been looking for Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"I am the man."

"As I thought, and I told Hurdle so yesterday, when you drove up to the hotel. Who is the person with you?"

"The other whom you sent for, sir."

"Indeed! But by what chance came you here together?"

"We are talking too much in the wind yet, Mr. Rashton. I must know more before I confide more."

"You are cautious and conservative, two necessary characteristics for one in your line, I should say. I sent for you in the way of business, as I briefly gave you the hint."

"You said you required my services."

"I do. And I have been eagerly awaiting your coming. Why did you not come to me at once?"

"I wanted to see which way the wind was blowing, sir, before I made myself known to any one, even to you."

"Well, it was all right. But I venture to say that you learned nothing whatever. Come, now, confess that you learned nothing."

"Nothing at all, sir."

"For the reason that nothing is known. We—Hurdle and myself—have been keeping our horrible discovery strictly secret, in order to give you every advantage to solve the mystery."

"And Miss James is connected with this mystery, as you term it?"

"She is, indeed!"

"Well, I imagined so, but I told her we had better each see you separately, not knowing just what you might have to say to each."

"I think it is better so—far better so. No knowing how the frightful discovery may affect her. I sent for her because we think that she can greatly aid you in clearing up the case."

"Well, what is the case? Let me have your story, sir."

"Rather, suppose I lead you direct to the discovery, and let you see it as we found it, without any previous impression."

"Well, that is for you to say, sir. I am agreeable to anything."

"Then we will go down."

The bank president arose from his seat, motioned Dick to follow, and passed out into the bank proper.

"I would have you come with us," he said to his cashier; "but it might not do for you to leave here. We have to be on the alert every moment, Mr. Peters, during business hours. Robberies are so numerous here in the West."

"Has your bank ever experienced anything of that sort?"

"No; and we are anxious that it never shall. This way, please."

He opened a narrow door behind the bank safes, disclosing a slender staircase that led downward.

He began the descent, Dick following, and at the bottom the president stopped and took a lantern from a peg, which he proceeded to light.

"We will have need of this," he remarked, "for we are going still lower, where there is absolutely no light whatever."

"What! Still another cellar below this?"

"Yes; and we did not know it until a short time ago—in fact, just before I sent for you."

"And it was there that you made what you call the horrible discovery, eh? I begin to get the drift of the situation a little."

"You guess aright. And, I may as well tell you something of the past history of the building before we proceed further. That will give you the situation just as we found it."

"All right, sir."

"Some years ago this building was erected—in fact, it was about the first large building the camp had. It was used first as a gambling place, and then as a

private bank. At that time the upper floor, the floor over the banking room, was still used for gambling purposes.

"Then came the time when Flush Flats was anything but flush in fact; the thing went under and the building was closed up. That was something like three years ago. The next year I formed a company and got hold of the Dauphin Mine; the town took on another boom immediately, and I began to look around for the owner of this building, to buy it."

"I could not find him, or them—for there were more than one, and it was not until about a year ago that I did find them, and then succeeded in buying the property. I took possession immediately, and opened my bank, with my son-in-law as cashier and head man generally, and we have been doing a rushing business ever since. We came to the conclusion, a few weeks ago, that we must have a vault made, to be up to the times."

"Examining the floor, we discovered a blind door leading down to a place still lower and going down to explore it, we came across the horror which I am about to show you."

"And the discovery of which, as you have told me, you have kept entirely secret, sending for me that I might, if possible, help in the solving of what you are pleased to call a profound mystery. All right, lead on, Mr. Rashton, and we'll see what can be made of it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRIM DISCOVERY.

"Follow me," and Mr. Rashton stepped down from the little landing at the foot of the stairs upon what seemed to be the solid earth.

Earth it certainly was, and it was some time before Dick Bristol got the full understanding of the situation and the clever ruse that somebody had been playing.

The bank president led the way to the wall at one side, where he stopped and bade Dick look around.

Here a hole had been made, and a flooring of planks was revealed.

The earth had been put in to cover the floor.

"You see the trick?" asked the president. "To hide a crime, this floor was covered six inches deep all over with earth, to make it appear like solid earth."

"Yes, I see; and a clever trick it was."

"It might never have been discovered, or, at any rate, not until the plank flooring had rotted away."

"You are right."

"But when we came down here we thought we would examine the nature of the bottom, and did so, which betrayed the trick immediately, and not only that, but more."

"That is to say, this trap door."

"Precisely. As if guided by Providence, the first thrust of the pick struck this hinge, and when we had scraped away the earth with a shovel, the door was revealed, and we opened it."

The door in question was about three feet square.

In one edge was an iron ring, and on the opposite side were a pair of big hinges.

While the banker held the light, Deadwood Dick stooped and laid hold upon the ring and pulled the door up, laying it back and disclosing the hole beneath.

There were no steps, but none were needed, for it was only a distance of three or four feet to the bottom, and the president let himself in with care not to soil his clothes.

"Come right on, sir," he said, "but stop short when I give you the word."

"I am with you," answered Dick, leaping lightly down.

They had to stoop low, in order to be able to move, but the depth increased as they advanced.

The ground sloped downward toward the center, in which way Rashton advanced with the light, Dick right behind him, who soon saw the secret of the dismal hole into which they had penetrated.

On the ground, in the center of the pit, lay a skeleton.

"Stop!" said the president, when they had come within four feet of where the hideous reminder lay. "Do you see?"

"I see," said Dick.

"Examine closely, sir."

Just where the skeleton lay was an iron stanchion, reaching from the bedrock to the summit of the building, supporting the central weight of the structure.

Around this stanchion was a rusty chain, which also embraced the skeleton in a way horribly suggestive, and this chain was secured with two big locks.

Nor was that all, as Dick looked yet closer, for between the jaws of the skeleton was a short piece of chain, also secured with a lock.

Dick would have stepped nearer, but the banker detained him.

"No nearer, yet," he ordered. "Look still more closely, before you advance another foot. Would that we had done so, in the first instance."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective, in some surprise.

"Examine the ground."

Dick did so, and in a moment an exclamation escaped him.

"Ha! I see! The poor fellow, by the only means possible, has given us a clew!"

"It might have been a clew, Deadwood Dick, had not Hurdle and myself trampled upon a portion of it before we discovered what it was, but now I fear it has been spoiled."

"I hope not."

"What we saw first was your name, there where you see it yourself."

There, in the ground—rather upon it, for the letters were raised—in letters of sand, was the name—

DEADWOOD DICK.

And under that, in similar letters, the word—

AVENGE.

"He must have known you," said the banker.

"Perhaps, but not necessarily so; he may have heard of me by reputation. What further wording remains?"

"Take the light, step forward carefully, and see for yourself."

On another section of an imagined circle, and at the same distance from the stanchion, to which it was plain the man had been chained, Dick read these additional words, similarly formed—

JENNIE JAMES,
St. Paul.

This, with the other, occupied a half of the circle, that half farthest from the trap door which opened into the place. On that side had been other words, but they had been trampled upon, as the bank president had explained. This was to be regretted.

"It is too bad you did not see them sooner," observed Dick.

"Yes, indeed, too bad."

"And this gave you the idea of sending at once for the lady and myself, I see. Poor fellow!"

"Who can he have been?"

"We must discover that, sir. Now, let me see if I can make out anything of these obliterated words."

He examined them closely, but only a few of the letters remained.

One was like this—and even then some of the letters were not perfect, but had to be guessed:

—OD— —R—LD
—ul.

And the other:

—GE— —DS—.

That was all that could be made out; absolutely all.

But it was sufficient for Deadwood Dick.

Knowing what he did, it gave him the key.

"What can you make of it?" asked Rashton.

"It gives me a clew, sir."

"And you think you can find the wretch who was so cruel, so heartless, as to chain a fellow creature here to die?"

"I think I can, and I will, too, if life is spared me. He appealed to me, and it shall not be an appeal in vain if Richard Bristol can do aught to carry out his desire."

"God grant that you may be able to bring the guilty to justice," said the president.

"I hope that I may, sir—in fact, I will, if the murderer is alive and I can strike his trail. And you may be able to help me by giving me more of the particulars of the history of this building, sir. This crime was probably done by the fellows who last controlled it."

"Ah! yes, to be sure. In fact, we have thought so, and yet it does not seem possible that men of business could— But some men are equal to anything, and the motive may have been great."

"It should not have been great enough for this atrocious deed!"

"That is true, that is very true."

"We can read the signs: This poor wretch was locked in chains to this post, a gag of chain was placed in his mouth and locked there, and here he was left to die, miserably. Heavens! It was a cruelty unworthy the worst of savages! I will avenge it, yes, I swear that I will, as surely as I am Deadwood Dick!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRAGMENT LEFT.

Deadwood Dick spoke with almost fierce determination.

There was something in all this that appealed to him with awful force; it was the strongest call he had ever received for the exercise of his skill in uncovering crime and bringing guilty wretches to justice.

The unexampled cruelty of the crime, and the appeal that had been made to him by the dying man, in the manner in which he could make anything known—it was enough—more than enough!

"Shall we go?" asked the president.

"We may as well, I suppose."

"And what about this? Shall we make it known, now?"

"Decidedly not, sir. We must keep it secret, in order to work in the dark; not a soul must be informed of this discovery or of my identity."

"I see; better so."

"To make it known would be to give the wretch an opportunity to get out of the country, and we must guard against that."

"You have only to direct me, Mr. Bristol, and I will do whatever you say, and so will Hurdle. The matter is known only to us three, at present, and the circle need not be widened."

"It must not be widened, positively, as I have said."

"What about the young woman?"

"Ah! that is so; she must be told.

And yet, it will be a terrible blow to her."

"Then you think the poor fellow was—"

"Her lover!"

"Indeed!"

"You must keep this as secret as the rest of it, for the present. I think you had better not see the lady yourself, but let me deal with her."

"I am mighty glad of the chance to let you do it, if what you say is true, that he was her lover."

"Then it shall be done that way. Have you looked around carefully for a further clew? That is, something that may have been dropped by the fellows when they put their victim here."

"No, we made no such search."

"Then I will do so before we go. It will save another trip down here, and I may possibly find something."

Dick still held the lantern, and began a careful search of the dismal hole in every part, but it was a useless one, for nothing was discovered that would throw more light upon the mystery.

Coming again to the central space, he there examined more closely than ever the ground where the skeleton lay.

Suddenly an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Rashton.

"Writing in the earth with this old nail!"

"Then possibly you have found the whole story. What does it say?"

"Worse luck, sir; we have trampled it almost out of sight; but a little of it remains."

"Read it! read it!"

"Which I am trying to do. Poor fellow, he no doubt found this nail in the boards over his head, and made use of it, after spending so much time making the larger letters."

"Better so, for the writing would never have been discovered of itself."

Dick was trying to decipher the further discovery which his keen search had disclosed.

The writing was in big script in the soft but firm clay that lay on the rock and formed the bottom or floor of the pit, but only a little of it now remained.

All that could be made out was this:

	June 9	here by
	who has	the pa-
per	where	fortune
is hid	find	to her

Dick read this aloud as he deciphered it.

"Then there was a fortune at stake, it seems," said Rashton.

"So it appears; and that is going to complicate matters, I am afraid. Has the fortune been found?"

"Who can tell?"

"Well, it devolves upon me and my pard to find out. The murderer, I take it, has a paper that tells where it has been concealed, and to find it we must first find him. Mr. Rashton, the motive for the crime grows deeper at every step."

"It certainly appears to, sir."

"Well, let us return to your office."

"Yes, for I will be glad enough to get out of here, I assure you."

"Not by any means a pleasant place. We will allow the skeleton to remain where it is, for the present."

"You have use for it here?"

"It may be useful here before the case terminates."

"You have only to command, Mr. Bristol, and what you command shall be carried out. I am determined that the terrible mystery shall be cleared."

They got up out of the hole, closed the trap after them, and ascended the stairs leading to the bank above, having put out the lantern below and replaced it upon its peg.

The girl's face blanched.

"Then it is as I have feared?" she asked.

"Yes; as you surmised, my pard."

"That he is dead?" and she dropped her head, and for some moments was silent, as if struggling with deep emotion.

"Well, I have been so long prepared for it," she said, presently, lifting her eyes, "that it is less of a shock. I can stand all the rest you have to tell me, now. But, first of all, one question. Was he murdered?"

"Yes, he was, undoubtedly."

"As I feared—as I suspected."

"I think you can bear it all, and I think it best to tell you everything, so that we can work together."

"Yes, yes, we must do that; keep nothing back."

"Well, I will. But nerve yourself, so that you can endure it, for otherwise it may overcome you."

"I cannot understand what you mean; you have said he was murdered; what worse can there be than that? But, say, do you know who killed him?"

"I suspect."

"Whom?"

"Brandson."

"As I thought. Ah! now that I know, I live for vengeance, and for that only."

"But, remember, he is innocent until we can prove him guilty, Miss James."

"My own heart tells me that he is guilty. But the story; let me hear all that you have learned."

So Dick proceeded and told the whole matter, bringing it out as delicately as possible, but even that could not rob it of any of its horror.

Before he had done the girl was pacing the floor before him, wringing her hands, her face a picture of pitiful anguish; but, no sooner had he ceased speaking, than she lifted her hands and cried out:

"High Heavens, hear me! I vow that this crime shall be avenged, and that this wretch shall die by my hands! Poor—poor Dory!"

She sank down upon a chair, utterly overcome.

"I have already registered a similar vow," said Dick. "We will work upon the case together, and we will bring him to the fate he deserves."

"No, no; it must be I, and I alone, to deal with him, after he has been discovered! Say that you will turn him over to me, or we must break our bargain here and now, and I will go on alone!"

"I agree. Doing that, I will be doing, probably, just what he would have me do."

"Yes, yes; be sure of that!"

"And then this fortune is to be found, if it has not already been discovered."

"Poor Dory! It is plain that he was keeping his vow that he would win riches; but how much better for us both if he had never undertaken the mission! And yet, who can tell—"

"Can tell what?"

"He might have been murdered just the same."

"And perhaps you as well. Such a villain would stop at nothing, that is certain."

"I believe you. Well, I suppose I must keep my word with Maud, and tell her of this terrible discovery."

"Great Scott! That is something that I forgot for the time being!"

"You know I pledged her my word that I would tell her whatever I happened to learn?"

"I hoped to keep it entirely still, in order to work secretly. To tell her may upset the game for us at this important moment."

"I am not bound to give her any of the particulars."

"That is what I was going to advise. You can tell her the main fact; that is all that you need to do. That will be keeping your word with her."

"Yes; that must suffice. I will inform her that Dory is dead, and that our search is at an end. But, she may not believe me, and instead, may think I am trying to deceive her."

"Well, she must think what she will."

"I see no other way out of it. And now, what is going to be done? How can we get on the track of the wretch and run him to earth?"

Thereupon Deadwood Dick gave her his views, and explained a plan that had come to his mind as the first step to be taken, and she approved of it.

At that moment Dick noticed the woman give a great start, and instantly she whipped a revolver from the inside of her coat.

He sprang and caught her arm.

"What's up?" he demanded, and followed her gaze, looking out between the slats of the closed shutters.

"That man!" she hoarsely gasped. "It is he—the one who just passed the bank!"

"Brandson, you mean. Is that the man?"

"Yes, yes; and I am glad that you checked me. To shoot him thus would be no revenge at all."

"And would only get you into serious trouble, from which even I might not be able to extricate you. No, no; you must do nothing so mad as that. But, you are positive?"

"Heavens! Do you suppose that I can be mistaken?"

"And he is in no disguise?"

"He used to wear a beard, but now he has none; that is all the difference."

"Well, I will form his acquaintance, and see what I can learn, on the sly. He can have no reason to suspect me. We must know what has brought him here."

"And I must take good care that he does not recognize me. But he certainly will do that, and Maud, too, if he happens to meet her. I am afraid he will take alarm."

"We must take care that she does not spoil the game for us. Suppose you see if she is in her room, and ask if you and I may see her there for a chat. Tell her you have discovered something."

CHAPTER XI.

COMPLICATIONS.

The young woman nodded assent, and hurried out.

Dick took the chair she had just vacated and watched the man pointed out.

The fellow entered the Odeon, farther down the street, and did not reappear before the return of Nobby Nancy, bringing with her Star Sterling.

"You want to see me, sir," the latter asked.

"Yes. Please take a seat."

"What is your business with me?"

"Has Miss James told you nothing?"

"She said you have news for me."

"Yes, I have. Sit down, and let us talk seriously about a serious matter. There is reason why you two ladies should work together now."

"Never! We are against each other, first and last!"

"You mean that you were. Sit down and hear me out, and you will see that I am right."

"Then you have learned—" and she became pale.

"Nobby, tell her, as you agreed."

"We have learned positively that Dory Barefield is dead," explained Nobby Nancy, sorrowfully.

"Dead? Where, when, how? You must tell me everything if you expect me to believe you. How can I be sure that this is not a trick of yours?"

"It is the truth," interposed Dick. "I am in Miss James' employ, and have discovered the awful truth, in part. He was murdered, and we suspect that Brandson did the deed."

"Brandson? Oh, curse him, if he did that!"

"And we have found that Brandson is right here in the camp."

"Here? Then my revenge shall be had! I will watch for him, and will slay him for his crime!"

"You must go slow about that," protested Dick. "We have got to prove that he is guilty, first; then we can bring the crime home to him, all working together."

"No; I must deal with him myself! I must be the avenger!"

"You shall not," said Dick, sternly. "I will not allow it."

"How will you hinder, let me ask you, sir?"

"By placing you under arrest, if necessary, which I have authority to do."

"And what do you want me to do, then?"

"Let me tell you, and then you can decide. In the first place, what if Brandson should see you? Would he not recognize you?"

"I suppose he would."

"And would immediately suspect trouble."

"With good reason, too! I would kill him, had I the chance."

"I hope you will listen to reason, and not stand in your own light. He must not see you."

"How can it be prevented?"

"I mean, he must not see you to know you. You can plead a cold, and not sing at the Odeon, and we three must work against him to prove his guilt beyond question."

"And what then?"

"Then will come your sweet revenge, if you loved the murdered man as well as you claim."

"And what of her?" with a jerk of the hand toward Nobby Nancy.

"Well, what of her?" asked Dick. "There is no longer anything for you to fight over; you can join forces and work against the man who has injured both of you alike."

Dick had a delicate game to play, and doubted whether he would be able to play it successfully, with two such unruly cards in his hand.

The two young women looked at each other fiercely.

"I have not heard all," reminded Maud. "You have not told me how you came to know what you do."

"Nor shall you know," cried Nobby Nancy. "It was a mistake to think that you and I could agree to work together, even with Dory dead. We are foes to the last!"

"I do not believe that he is dead!"

"And I care not whether you do or not. I have told you the mournful fact, as I agreed to do. Had I not agreed you never would have known it from my lips, rest assured of that."

"Ladies, this will not do," Deadwood Dick protested. "I give you my word, Miss Weille, that Theodore Barefield is dead—that he was cruelly murdered, and I ask you to aid me in putting the crime where it belongs."

"How can I aid?"

"By doing nothing to awaken suspicion in the mind of this fellow Brandson, until I have had time to prove whether he is guilty or not."

"You said that he did the deed."

"No; I said we suspect that he did it, that was all."

"Well, that is enough. I will find out, and when I do, let him look well to himself."

With that, she left the room.

Dick and his pard looked at each other.

"Here is a mess," inferred Dick. "What's to be done?"

"And all because I would not heed what you asked of me."

"What was that?"

"Not to tell her of the discovery."

"Well, you had pledged your word, and you did not want to break it. Your excuse was valid. My own move was bad."

"What move?"

"Thinking that I could bring her and you together for the one common purpose of revenge. That was not to be thought of, and I should have given it more weight before acting."

"It is all done now."

"Or undone. Well, let us drop it. We still hold the secret, and, even if she does confront Brandon, she can prove nothing, and she will probably keep still as to how she got her information."

"Why will she do that?"

"Because Brandon loves you, as you have told me, and you would be able to secure the better chance for revenge."

"Ha! You have given me a thought. Can we not play that card?"

"How?"

"Let me meet him, as if by accident, pretend to know nothing of the death of Barefield, and appear as if my love had cooled. That may lead him to confide something that will entrap him!"

"Not likely that it will, but it is a card to hold in reserve. We are approaching a climax of some sort."

"I agree with you."

"The fact that all are here together, is suggestive. Now, I must go and make the acquaintance of this man, and when I have done that, one step will have been gained."

"And what am I to do meantime?"

"Avoid him, and keep your eye upon your rival, as much as possible, to see what she is doing."

"Very well; I understand. There must be no failure, Mr. Bristol, no matter what arises. I trust to you to bring about my time of vengeance, and then I will do my part."

Dick left the hotel, and bent his steps in the direction of the Odeon.

His mind was busy, for he now had a most delicate game to play, and it demanded his utmost tact.

Of course, his duty was to bring the guilty ones to justice, and he must use these two women to that end, yet let them think they were each having it her own way.

He would avenge the dead man who had so touchingly appealed to him, but by means of the law only. But, could he thwart the faithful woman who had taken oath that the guilty wretch should die by her hand? And, could he keep the rivals from doing anything rash before the crime could be brought home to the fellow?

With these things in mind, he did not notice the approach of a man.

CHAPTER XII.

DICK GAINS A POINT.

The man was Stuttering Samson.

Dick did not observe him till he came face to face with him in front of the Odeon.

Then he noted that quite a crowd had followed the bully, and understood at once that the trouble with him was going to be renewed.

"S-s-s-say," Samson began to stutter, "I have g-g-g-got to d-d-d-d-d-

"If you have got anything to say to me, sing it," exclaimed Dick, impatiently. "I hate to be stuttered at in that fashion."

"Well, I don't blame you for that, for I wouldn't like it myself, I know. Here is your ten dollars; I have got to lick you, or take a lickin' myself, and as I don't want to do that, you have got to be the sufferer!"

"Mainard told you that?"

"That's what he did; rol, de-rol, de-rido!"

"Well, keep the ten dollars, for it will be worth that much to you, at any rate, to get twice whipped the same day."

"What do you mean? ding-a-long-dido!"

To save time he sang.

"You said Mainard could whip you, did you not?"

"That is just what is the matter with Hanner; to-ra-loo-ra-loo-day, to-ra-loo-ra-loo!"

He was musical, and, starting a bar, he had to carry out the measure with meaningless words, if he had nothing further to say.

"Well, I know well enough that I can do the same," averred Dick, "and so you are in for a double dose, you see. Now, if you will take a little sound advice, I am willing to give it."

"Well, w-w-w-what is it?"

"You will admit that two good things are better than one, I suppose."

"C-c-c-c-certainly."

"And one bad thing is not as bad as two bad things, by the same standard. You had better take one whipping, and omit the other."

"I d-d-d-don't k-k-k-k-ketch on."

"The trouble is, you seem to catch all the time, when you talk. What I mean is this: If you go back to Mainard and report that you can't whip me, then you will get but one whipping, but if you are foolish about it—"

"K-k-k-k-k-k-k-confound you! Do you mean to say that I can't do it?"

"That is my impression, decidedly."

"Well, I'll have to take that impression out of you, by the jumpin' too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra-laddy-oh!"

"I see you are bound to have it, my friend, but I warn you once again that you are running up against the Simon Pure article when you run up against me, and I am peculiar in more ways than one, too."

"And you will find that I'm peculiar, too; sing-a-heyday, ding-a-dong-a-daddy!"

"You will sing something else, shortly. Are you ready?"

"I'm waiting, my darling, for thee!"

"Well, I won't keep thee waiting; wade right in and set your machine to running."

"You just bet your life I will do that, and you'll find it runs much better than my tongue; whang, dang, dey, de-deydo!"

The crowd was laughing and hooting and enjoying the fun immensely.

Dick was keeping an eye out everywhere in his usual manner, and saw the stranger come from the Odeon, with the others who came pouring out to see the sport.

He had a chance for a good look at the stranger before the exercises commenced.

Another man seemed to be in company with him—a tall, dark fellow, who had a nervous manner and restless gaze.

This was about all Dick had time to observe before Stuttering Samson was coming for him, but he had made mental photographs of their faces and would know them at sight.

"M-m-m-mind your eye!" stuttered Samson.

"I'll try to. What will you give me to cure you of stuttering?"

"Everything I've g-g-g-g-got in the

w-w-w-w-world, clear d-d-d-d-down t-t-t-to m-m-m-m-my sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-shirt."

He had to stop out of range long enough to stutter that out, for he could not do anything else when he had stuttering to do, and the fight had to wait for him to finish.

"Well, I will knock it half out of you," assured the man in velvet, "and your employer can finish the job when he takes you in hand, if he is a man of his word."

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-say?"

"Well?"

"K-k-k-k-k-k-k-can you k-k-k-k-k-k-k-cure it?"

"Well, I don't know. I once cured a man from looking cross-eyed, and perhaps I can cure you."

"How was that? ri-too-ri-laddy!"

Eager to hear, he saved time by singing.

"Why, he took a notion to go for me, about as you are doing, only under different circumstances, and nothing I could do would make him desist. And, by the way, I had rather fight with a woman than with a cross-eyed man; that is one of my peculiarities; you can never tell where he is going to strike. I paid no attention to the way he seemed to be looking, for I knew it wasn't safe, but I watched his big fists, and when they began to play, I struck out and tapped him on the forehead. When he came to his eyes were as straight as yours."

The crowd roared, and Stuttering Samson had to laugh with them.

"Why, you are not so unfortunate, after all," cried Dick, jocosely. "You can laugh without stuttering as well as sing; you have not much to complain about, my friend."

This seemed to exasperate the fellow instantly, since the laugh turned against his misfortune.

Without stopping to do any more stuttering, or even to sing, he made a dash forward, as if seeking a similar cure for his affliction.

He got it—the dose—without any waste of time, whether effective or not, and away he went, end over end, until he was stopped by some of the bystanders, who laid him tenderly on the ground.

Dick had given him one of his peculiar straight shoulder hits.

"That was about the hardest crack I ever witnessed," cried out the fellow in the light suit.

"Why, hello, Harrison!" cried Dick, advancing quickly and holding out his hand. "What in creation has brought you away out in this part of the—Blazes! I guess I have made a mistake."

He stopped suddenly, on coming nearer, and stared at the man.

"Yes, you have made a mistake," said the stranger, "for my name is not Harrison, and never was; but, all the same, I would like to shake hands with you."

"Well, here you are, then! I never saw two men look more alike, at first sight. I see a difference now."

"My name is Simon Peters," continued Dick. "They call me the Peculiar, because I am a little peculiar in some of my ways."

"And that tap on the head was one of the ways."

"Well, yes; that is one of my peculiarities."

"Do you think you have cured him of his trouble?"

"I hope I have not killed him."

"No; he begins to peep."

"I hope I have cured him of his desire to monkey with me, anyhow. But, by the way, introduce yourself."

Dick's manner was hearty, and the two men took to him.

"My name is Hardy Blaker. My friend here is Mr. John Ormsted."

"Pleased to know you," avowed Dick. "Won't you come in here and crook your elbows at my expense? I'll make up for the mistake I made, and it will be a good way to get out of sight of this fellow."

"Why, certainly, we will take something with you, for we are strangers here, and want to make some friends."

"Well, I am a stranger myself, for that matter, but you will find that I am the real stuff, when you come to sample the package. Come right in and say what your poison shall be."

So saying, Dick led the way, and they entered the Odeon.

CHAPTER XIII. A SLICK STORY.

Deadwood Dick advanced to an unoccupied table a little out of the way, and drew out chairs.

The trio sat down, and Dick gave an order for wine and cigars.

"I'm glad to meet two such fellows as you seem to be," he remarked, "being a stranger here myself."

"And we are glad to meet a fellow like you," declared the one calling himself Hardy Blaker.

"By the way, what is your business, Mr. Peters?" asked Ormsted.

"Well, a little of anything that promises money. I am not really particular what it is. What's yours?"

"About the same."

"Perhaps we can come closer to the point when we get better acquainted. I never speak right out to strangers until I have given them a chance to prove up, and I take it that it's the same with you."

They looked at each other.

"Well, you are blunt," averred Blaker.

"Yes, I make that a rule; it is one of my peculiarities, I suppose."

"You seem like a good sort of fellow to tie to, anyhow. Where do you hail from?"

"I hardly know where. I have seen nearly the whole country, but have never stopped long enough in one place to call it home. I am a rover, pure and simple, is all I can say."

"You look like a sport."

"I am."

"A card sharp?"

"Well, yes, and no; I am handy with the cards."

"You seem reticent."

"Well, to speak right out, I am looking for a fortune, and don't particularly care how I get it."

The two men exchanged glances again.

"You mean that you have got your eye on one?" asked Blaker.

"No, not that. I mean that I would like to have. You see, I am tired of being poor."

"Ha! ha! That is about the way with every poor man, I believe. We are fellows of a kind, in that respect. Not that we are beggars, but we are not rolling in riches."

"We can shake hands then."

The wine had been brought, and they were drinking and smoking socially.

Their talk ran on for a long time, and their friendship seemed to grow in strength rapidly.

Deadwood Dick, needless to say, was appearing to play into their hands.

"Say, are you good at solving secrets?" suddenly asked Blaker.

"Well, it is according to what it is," answered Dick.

"Did you ever try your hand at a difficult enigma?" asked Ormsted.

"There was a time when it took a difficult one to stick me," was the careless response. "Have you got something of that kind on hand?"

Again an exchange of glances.

"See here; suppose we talk business," intimated Blaker.

"I talk business all the time," asserted Dick. "I am wide open to propositions."

"Well, we have got a puzzle to solve, and if you want to go into it with us we will give you a share of the profits, provided you can be of any use to us. What say?"

"Count me in, if there is any real money in prospect."

"There is, and maybe a good round fortune."

"Then I am your man."

"Good enough; and I'll tell you the story just as it is, but first I'll fill my glass again."

Their glasses were all filled anew, and they settled down to enjoy their cigars, while Blaker unfolded his tale.

"We were down in the City of Mexico," he began, "when we came across a chap who was pretty well off at the heel, and who seemed in distress in more ways than one, being a stranger in a strange land, and, as he was a fellow countryman, we took pity on him and gave him a boost."

"The fellow seemed to want to get further away from home, and said he had a secret to sell, if we wanted to buy, and he kept at us so much that finally we thought we would investigate and see what there was in it, as he declared there was a fortune at stake for the lucky finder, and he said that he alone possessed the key to the hiding-place."

"Like you, Mr. Peters, we were on the lookout for a fortune, and when he put it in that light we were not long in biting. We heard his story, examined the paper he had, and feeling that it was worth risking the small amount he demanded of us, we paid him the money, took the paper, and parted. He went off to the south, and we struck out for home, and here we are on the ground, to look for the fortune, if there is one."

"Maybe it was only a fake," opined Dick.

"Well, possibly, but the fellow swore that he had good reason to think the fortune was there."

"Had he ever tried to find it?"

"Yes; but failed."

"And he knew it was in this part of the country?"

"This very place, or in this neighborhood."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do: Give me a sixth of whatever is found, and I will go in with you and do my best."

"Agreed!" from both.

"All right!" declared Dick, "it is a bargain. When shall we begin the search? I am eager, now that you have taken me in with you. I suppose you have told me all?"

"Yes; you have heard everything there is to tell, and now we will show you the paper."

"Yes, the paper, that's so; I can't be of much use to you until I see that."

"Is this a good place to examine it?"

"Well, no, I should say not," said Dick. "There are too many standing around already. Secrecy is better now. Why not come to my room at the hotel?"

"All right, we'll go there."

All three left the place, going up the street to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

Dick felt somewhat of concern lest Star Sterling, seeing them coming, might try a shot at Brandson, and was afraid, too, that they might meet Nobby Nancy.

Neither of these things happened, however, and they reached the room without adventure.

Dick drew the table and chairs near the window, and invited his companions to be seated.

All were sober enough, yet they had enough wine inside to make them very friendly and confidential, and Dick felt

that this, if ever, was his chance to draw them out.

Blaker took a packet from his pocket, which he opened carefully.

It contained a sheet of paper, on which was drawn a rude map, with marks here and there, and letters and numbers.

"Now, there it is, Simon Pure," he remarked, "and if you can make head or tail of it you are a Simon Pure, and no mistake. We have come here determined to find it this time or bust."

They had been there before, then? But that, of course, Dick well enough knew. The story of the man in Mexico was all a myth.

Dick took the paper and studied it well.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

"Could you find any of these points?" Dick musingly asked.

"Not a blasted one of 'em!" asseverated Blaker. "That was the trouble; we couldn't get the start."

Dick had to smile, to see how neatly the man dropped into the trap.

"And where have you searched?" Dick further asked. "There is no use going over the same ground twice. Once we can get a starting point, the rest ought to be easy."

"Well, we searched all around here, but in a hurry— Mind, I am speaking for the man we saw in Mexico."

"Certainly; I understand that," Dick waived.

"You see, he told us so plainly all about it that it seems as if we had been here ourselves. He named every building in the place, almost."

"Then it is not long since you saw him?"

"Only a little while."

"And not long since he was here?"

"He had just come from here."

"Then his search was recent, of course, and he could give you a good, clear understanding of it."

"Just as I said; so real that it seemed as if we had been here on the ground ourselves. That's why I spoke the way I did, you see."

"Well, we are all pards, now, and you might as well keep right on speaking so, as far as the fellow gave you any light. And, if the search in and near the town has been made, we must branch out and strike new ground."

"That looks reasonable."

"It is the only thing to do. When shall we begin?"

"To-morrow will be time enough, I should say; no use breaking our necks about it."

"Just what I was going to propose," assured Dick. "That will give me more time to make a study of this rather enigmatic map, and maybe I can hit upon the key if I take time for it."

"That's so."

"But, I didn't think; you will not want to leave it in my care. I desire nothing that does not look fair, and that would give me a chance to profit by it. No, you keep it till we meet again."

"Nonsense!" cried Ormstead. "We know that you are all right, Peters, and we trust you."

"Certainly," agreed Blaker. "You keep the paper."

"No, I won't do it," decided Dick. "It is yours, and I have no right to have it alone in my possession. I won't take the responsibility. But I'll tell you what we can do, and that will be fair for all."

"What is that?"

"Come to my room again to-night, and we will give it a careful study then. I will have some wine and cigars on hand,

and it will be a pleasant way to spend the evening, and we can get better acquainted."

"Well, we'll be there, you bet."

Dick had been studying the paper with care, even while talking, and had fixed its points well in mind.

He now folded it and returned it to Blaker.

"Take mighty good care of it," he cautioned. "If you lose it we are dumped, and I am anxious to come in for my share of the find."

"Don't have any fear of my losing it; I have carried it too long to lose it now—that is, having carried it so far, all the way from Mexico here. I can guard it as well as its former owner."

"Yes, I understood what you meant."

"Then we'll meet to-night. What time?"

"Well, fix that to suit yourselves."

"Say nine o'clock, then. That will be about right, I guess," said Blaker.

"That suits me," acquiesced Dick. "You will find me here when you come, and then for a hard study of the map."

"Are you going out again?"

"Not now; I'll take a rest, I think, before dinner."

"Well, so long, pard, and hope we'll be successful. See you later."

"Yes, see you later," responded Dick. "Take care that no one else gets into the thing with us."

So they parted, the two going out and Dick remaining.

Not one of them was aware that they had had a listener, but such was the fact, nevertheless; and that listener had been Star Sterling. She had overheard all that had been spoken loud enough for her acute ears to catch.

A pipe-hole between her room and the one occupied by Deadwood Dick had given her the advantage.

She had seen the three men come out of the Odeon, and, hearing them enter Dick's room, had taken advantage of the hole we have mentioned.

On Dick's side of the partition the hole was behind a stand, and he had no knowledge of its existence.

As soon as the men had gone, Dick paced the floor.

"Well, the ball is rolling," he mused, "and the trap is set. Now it only remains to play well the rest of the game, and the thing is done. A quicker case than I ever imagined it would be. But the hand of fate seems to be in it, sending the fellows here just at this time."

While he was pacing up and down, thinking, there came a knock at the door.

He opened it and Nobby Nancy entered.

"I could not wait for you," she said. "I had to come and ask you how you ever did it, and what you found out?"

"Oh! by letting them think they were doing it all themselves."

"And what have you learned?"

"That they are here in search of the fortune, with the original paper in their possession."

"Then they are the guilty ones without a doubt. Is it not proof enough in itself?"

"Yes, to satisfy us, but we must have such proof as will convince others, if need be."

"No matter about others; I am the one to be convinced, and, once convinced, I will act."

"But you must do nothing rash or in haste. Remember, your lover left it to me to avenge his death. The fortune he left to you."

"How do we know that?"

"Judging by the fragment of writ-

ing I discovered. And, there is only one way to find the fortune."

"And what is that way?"

"By my keeping in with these fellows and working with them. All of us together may be able to bring it to light."

"I know you do not mean what you are saying."

"Why not?"

"You have no need of their aid, if once you get that paper into your possession. Your aim is to hold back my avenging hand; I can see through that. But you shall not do it."

"Nor will I try to do it. I see it is useless. I will aid you in your scheme first, and then, together, you and I will search for the fortune, and it shall be yours, as your lover intended. But we must take care to let nothing be known, or all may be lost."

CHAPTER XV.

COUNTER-PLOTTING.

Perhaps it was fortunate that they had held their more important conversations earlier.

The listener was still at her post, but what she heard further scarcely repaid her for the time spent. But she had heard enough—too much, in fact, already.

Early after dinner Maud went to the Odeon.

Dick saw her leave the hotel, and noticed that she wore a veil, from which he drew the wrong conclusion.

She entered the place by the rear way, and, once within, sent a boy in quest of Sanford Mainard, with the message that she desired to see him immediately for something important.

Mainard responded promptly.

"Well, you have made up your mind?" he asked at once.

"Yes."

"And what is your answer?"

"It is yes."

A smile came over the manager's face immediately, save where the suggestive lump was on his forehead, and he took a step forward quickly, but the young woman waved him back.

"Wait! Hear all!" she almost commanded.

"Is not that all?"

"No, it is not; there is a condition."

"Let me hear it, and immediately."

"I intend to do so. I will marry you, Mr. Mainard, if you will first aid me in obtaining a revenge and in cheating a hated rival out of the fortune she is trying to find."

"You talk in riddles."

"I once told you that I could never wed you because I had a lover living."

"Yes, you told me that."

"Well, now he is dead, and I must avenge his death. That done, and the fortune secured, I am yours. This is something that you can do for me, and at the same time benefit yourself."

"I stand ready to do that, of course."

"And you can have some revenge, too."

"How is that?"

"The man I am working against, in searching for the fortune, is the one who knocked you down—"

"Curse him!"

"The girl with him is the rival I speak of, and while I would not care to harm her bodily, I do want to cheat her out of the fortune her lover left to her when he was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"Yes; and his murderer is in town here, at this minute. He must die by my hand, or through me, and he is the one who now holds the secret concerning where the fortune is hid. Do you think

we can carry it out, and come out ahead in the game that is being played?"

"I see no reason why we can't."

"We have that fellow, Simon Pure, against us."

"And I am happy that we have, curse him! I will have some of the boys take care of him."

"But it must not be done too soon."

"Why not?"

"Because I suspect that he will get that paper into his hands to-night, somehow, and then he will set out to find the fortune."

"Then what is your plan?"

"To let him find it."

"And what then?"

"To wrest it from him, and thus cheat my hated rival just when she thinks she has everything her own way."

"I have an idea that we had better not let it go so far, for that fellow is a hustler, and might possibly give us the slip. Had we not better get at the paper and find it ourselves?"

"Well, perhaps. I do not care how it is accomplished, so long as the end is gained."

"And you promise to be mine on these conditions?"

"I do."

"Then consider it as good as done. I will get some of the toughs of the town to aid me, and we will upset their game so badly that they will not know where they are at."

"But, some things you must not forget."

"What are they?"

"You must allow these two strangers, as they appear here, to keep their appointment with Simon Pure to-night at nine."

"Well, we can do that; but, what is to be gained?"

"I can hear every word that is said, and will know which one has the secret paper."

"True enough. And what then?"

"Then we can lay further plans according to what I overhear, most likely for the capture of all three of the men. I have nothing against Simon Pure, save that he is aiding my rival."

"You have never told me the full story, and even now you are leaving me somewhat in the dark."

"I will tell it now."

And she did, giving the facts concerning the past about as they were, and telling of the present as she knew it from her point of observation.

Mainard listened with close attention.

"It seems, then, that they still have the best of you," he remarked.

"In what way?"

"Why, you have only the bare fact that your former lover is dead, while they seem to be in possession of all the particulars."

"You are right in that, and that is one reason why I want to have a little more time to spy upon them. I have an excellent advantage which they do not dream of."

She mentioned the pipe-hole leading from her room to that of the "peculiar" man.

"Well, it shall be as you desire, then," assented Mainard.

"And you will do nothing till you hear from me."

"Nothing, save to make ready to act."

"Then we clearly understand each other, and there remains nothing more to be said. You do your part, and I will keep my word with you."

So they parted, for the time being.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SNARE SPRUNG.

The remainder of the day passed quietly. No one could have imagined that such deep schemes were at work just under the surface.

At nine in the evening Deadwood Dick:

was in his room, with everything arranged for the reception of his visitors, and they were promptly on hand.

"Here we are," saluted Blaker, as Dick admitted them.

"And here, am I!" greeted Dick. "Hearty welcome to both of you."

"I see you have a spread," observed Ormsted, indicating the table, where wine and cigars were in plenty.

"As I promised, you remember. When I do a thing I like to do it right up brown. Hang up your hats, boys, and make yourselves at home. We are all one, I hope."

"Before we begin, I would like to ask the meaning of this?" said Blaker.

"The meaning of what?"

The man took a folded piece of paper from his pocket, opened it, and gave it to Dick, who read as follows:

"Strangers—You had better go slow with the acquaintance you have formed. Make sure there is no snag to run up against before you place too much confidence in the man. "FRIEND."

"Who the deuce does it mean?" Dick queried, carelessly.

"Who can it mean, but yourself?"

"But I am a stranger here, and nobody knows anything to my discredit. I can tell you, however, what we do, before we take another step."

"What is that?"

"Just drop me out of your scheme and go it alone! I don't want you to feel suspicious of me, and rather than have it so I will stop right where I am and do no more in the matter."

"We have not said that we heed this note, have we?"

"No matter; it is enough to make you suspicious, and I don't want to feel that I am not trusted, so we had better stop short and dissolve partnership."

"We don't want it that way. We want to go on with you. The more we see of you the better we like you, and we are not going to let this come between us. It is underhanded, anyhow."

"That is what it is. Have you made the acquaintance of any other man here?"

"We have become friendly with Mainard, manager of the Odeon."

"Then this may just as well refer to him."

"We thought of that."

"And it is in a woman's hand."

"What does that signify?"

"Hard to tell, but there was some trouble there last night—one of his singers having a little difficulty with a pard of mine."

"You have a pard, then?"

"Yes; a girl whom I am befriending. But, all this has nothing to do with our present business. Shall we drop it or carry it on?"

"We'll carry it on, by all means."

"Very well; but I want you to be satisfied that I am straight, that is all."

"And we are more than ever satisfied of it now. We wanted to see how you would take it."

"And I think the more of you for having shown it to me. Now I think we will be able to go ahead without any further hitches. But come, help yourselves to the wine and cigars!"

The listener in the opposite room bit her lips.

It is evident to the reader she was the one who had sent the note, but what she had to gain does not appear.

The men having disposed of their hats, accepted Dick's invitation and helped themselves to the wine, and all lighted cigars and settled down for a smoke.

"Where is the map?" asked Dick.

"Right here," and Blaker drew the packet from his pocket.

He tossed it to Dick, who spread the map out before him and began to pore over it.

"Make yourselves right at home, boys," he urged. "I must make a study of this, and you can sample the wine while I am doing it."

"We may overload," intimated Ormsted.

"No matter if you do. There is nothing to be done to-night. I must play light till I have done with this study; then I will join you."

They talked about one thing and another, but nothing of importance to the listener, and finally she gave up listening and left her room.

She had heard it decided that Dick should retain the map for the present, which was the point she had desired to gain.

Deadwood Dick studied on, pretendingly, jotting down figures and letters on another sheet of paper, and now and again would make some remark concerning his progress.

Meantime, his companions had begun to yawn, and finally both dropped off asleep. The wine had done for them!

Dick now arose, with a grim smile, putting the map into his pocket.

He shook first one and then the other of the two men, but neither so much as gave a grunt, and he laid them both on the floor.

Having done this, he proceeded to examine their pockets, and was well repaid for his trouble, for he found letters and papers which he marked and transferred to his own keeping.

He had learned the real names of the two men, and knew that Nobby Nancy had made no mistake in her recognition.

One was Eugene Brandson, the one who called himself Hardy Blaker, and the other was a Gus Osburn, as letters and papers fully proved. What part he had played was yet to be seen.

Leaving them there on the floor, Dick went out, locking the door after him, and went down-stairs.

In the sitting-room he found Nobby Nancy, reading.

"Well, what is the result?" she inquired.

"It is all right," answered Dick. "No mistake, and they are both helpless in my room."

"And what will you do now?"

"Nothing, until the town is asleep; then we will remove Brandson to the place where his victim died."

CHAPTER XVII. THE JUST REWARD.

Flush Flats was wrapped in slumber. Few lights were to be seen anywhere, and none in the vicinity of the bank and hotel.

The town had street lamps, which usually burned all night, but, in the small hours on this night, every lamp in the immediate vicinity of the town center was out, as if for some special reason.

Such was the case.

From the rear of the hotel several forms came forth, carrying a burden.

They crossed the street, choosing the deeper shadows for their purpose, and silently entered the bank building, closing the door behind them as noiselessly as it had been opened.

No one had seen them, and the town slept on, innocent of any knowledge of these proceedings.

Yet, in perfect silence, and in darkness, they proceeded into the bank proper.

Once there, they made their way to the door behind the safes, which one of their number opened, and they descended to the cellar beneath.

At the bottom of the steps they laid their burden on the ground, and a light was made, by means of which they all stood revealed.

There were Simon Pure, Nobby Nancy, Richard Rashton, and Henry Hurdle, the fifth was the night watchman, while the man on the floor was Hardy Blaker.

"Had you not better remain here?" asked Deadwood Dick of his pard.

"No; I must go on," was the response.

"Can you stand the horror of it?"

"I have nerved myself to stand it. The prospect of revenge sustains me. I will go with you."

"Very well, then."

When they had rested for a few moments they took up their burden again, and Mr. Rashton led the way, bearing the light.

The trap leading to the sub-cellar had been opened, and the bank president dropped down, helped Nobby Nancy after him, and the other three were soon successful in following with the sleeping murderer.

The young woman had looked around, and now stood for some moments with her hands over her face to shut out the heart-rending sight.

It required every effort she could bring to bear to prevent a flood of grief that would utterly unnerve her.

The man was carried to the iron support in the center of the hole, and the president of the bank produced a chain and lock.

The chain, of ample length, was passed around the stanchion, and then around the man's body, the latter in a close loop so that it would be impossible for him to remove it.

And there it was locked.

The chain would slip up and down the pillar, of course, and the man was laid on the ground beside the skeleton.

"It will be a terrible awakening," observed the cashier.

"I would never be a party to it, were there even the shadow of a doubt concerning his guilt," declared the president.

"Nor would I," echoed Deadwood Dick. "But there is no doubt. I have more than ample proofs. All now required is his confession, which we now shall have."

"And we care little for that," observed Nobby Nancy, grimly. "Confession will not mitigate his crime, the monster!"

Deadwood Dick understood her terrible intention, if she could be allowed to have her own way in the matter.

"Shall we leave the light?" asked Rashton.

"No," said the girl sport, promptly. "Let him come to in the dark, and then gradually realize the full horror of his position! I demand this, in the name of that awful reminder here at our feet!"

"Let it be so," assented Deadwood Dick. "It is no more than justice."

So they turned their backs upon the guilty wretch, and got up out of the hole into the cellar proper above.

"How long will he sleep?" asked Rashton.

"Maybe for hours longer," opined Dick.

"Then useless for us to wait here."

"We will not wait. We will come to him again, in the morning, when he will probably be ready to make a full confession."

"And then I demand the privilege of visiting him alone, first of all," said the girl sport. "He will recognize me, and I will show him that it is I who have avenged the death of the man I loved."

"Well, we can allow you that much satisfaction, at least," acquiesced Dick.

"It is all I ask."

They closed down the trap and made their way up from the cellar.

"Now," said the president to the watchman, "you will resume your night watch, and if you hear cries from the cellar, pay no heed to them."

"I understand, sir."

"Is he to be trusted?" asked the girl sport of Dick, in a whisper.

"Yes, or Rashton would not trust him, and this is really his matter, you have to admit."

"It was, before he sent for us."

"And for the reason that he did send for us we are bound to heed whatever he has to say."

"Save one thing."

"And what is that?"

"I am determined that Eugene Brandson shall never leave that hole alive, but that he shall meet the same fate to which he consigned my lover."

"What is that?" asked the bank president.

She had spoken a little louder.

"I say that he deserves the same fate to which he consigned my lover," the girl sport repeated.

"Yes, you are right; but we are human, I hope."

"An hour or two will be sufficient," said Rashton. "It will be an age of hell for him, and we shall find him ready to confess when we come to release him. Then the law will deal with him."

"That will be the right plan," agreed Deadwood Dick.

"Well, at least grant me the one favor I asked," urged the girl.

"And what is that?"

"To be the first one to go down and face him."

"Yes; we will grant you that, as already promised," the president assured.

With that understanding they separated, the night rolled silently on, and the morning dawned in due course, the camp awaking to the activities of another day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

Deadwood Dick was astir early.

So was Nobby Nancy, who joined Dick on the piazza.

While they were there in conversation, who should come along but Stuttering Samson.

There was a protuberance upon his forehead, and all the surrounding surface was black and blue and yellow-tinged, the result of the terrible blow Dick had given him the day before.

"G-g-g-g-good-m-m-mornin'," the stutterer stuttered.

"Good-morning," greeted Dick. "I see I did not succeed in effecting a cure in your case, my friend."

"Y-y-y-yes you d-d-d-did, t-t-too," was the rejoinder.

"But not your speech."

"You k-k-k-k-cured, all the s-s-s-s-same; you k-k-k-k-cured me of the n-n-n-n-notion that I k-k-k-k-could l-l-l-l-lick you."

"Well, I am glad I was able to do even that much for you. But, how about the man who sent you to perform the operation on me? Did he whip you again, when you reported?"

"Th-th-th-th-that is what b-b-b-brings me here th-th-th-th-this m-m-m-m-mornin'."

"Well, as life is short and time is precious, I will be just as well pleased if you will sing what you have got to say," said Dick.

"All right, my laddy, I can do that, you know; ri-tiddy, ri-taddy, ri-tay!"

"Well, sing your say, then."

"The boss, he says, the boss, says he, you can't lick him, if you have licked me; he calls you a coward, and says you don't dare to come and meet him just up there beyond the shafts, just out of town; and fight the thing to a clean knockdown."

Dick and the girl sport both had to laugh.

The fellow sang his message to a well-set tune, and had evidently prepared it to rhyme.

"I find that you are several other things besides a stutterer," remarked Dick. "You are something of a poet on a very small scale. But, what does that fellow take me for?"

"A k-k-k-k-coward, b'g-g-g-g-gosh!"

"Please stick to your singing. You make me nervous when you talk. I am willing to let him think what he pleases, and you may go back and tell him so."

"Then you won't fight?"

"Not unless I have to. I am not seeking fight this morning."

"Well, he says you'll have to, so you might as well get ready for it when he comes this way; ri-diddle-daddy, day!"

"He will find me ready, if it is his intention to come. But, can I do anything farther for you in that same line this morning? I like to give full satisfaction where I undertake—"

"I'm p-p-p-p-perfectly s-s-s-s-satisfied, th-th-th-thank you; n-no m-m-m-more f-f-f-f-for me."

And with that Stuttering Samson went off, leaving Dick and his pard to enjoy a good laugh at his expense, in spite of the fact that they rather pitied the man on account of his affliction.

They continued their talk.

Not a great while had elapsed when Sanford Mainard came along.

He did not look up as he approached, nor even as he passed, but in passing he snarled out:

"If you are not a coward, follow me!"

"Do you mean that for me?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, I mean it for you."

"Well, it is not necessary to follow you to prove that," Dick retorted, leaping over the railing and alighting upon the ground. "I can convince you right here."

"No, not here, sir; follow me, and I will convince you that you have made a foe of the wrong man. I cannot take the knockdown you gave me and not return it with interest."

"Where do you want to go to settle it?"

"Over there beyond the shafts of the Dauphin Mine, by the shanties which I presume you have noticed."

"And if I refuse to go?"

"I'll brand you a coward!"

"Barking dogs do little harm, but, for the sake of stopping your barking at my heels, and at the same time of convincing you of the error under which you are laboring, I will go with you."

Mainard had not stopped, which fact, perhaps, more than anything else, had edged Dick on.

Dick waved his hand to Nobby Nancy, and strode after the fellow.

Mainard kept straight ahead, at a rapid pace, and ere long had arrived at the buildings of the mine, around which he turned at a sharp angle, and headed in the direction of some shanties on the slope of the gulch.

He appeared to increase his gait, as Dick thought, as if with the intention of winding him before reaching the scene of the fight, but he had another purpose in view, and one of which Dick did not think, having no good reason to suspect anything of the kind.

The man passed between two of the shanties, and, motioning Dick to come on, disappeared behind a third.

Dick hastened on after him—resolved to punish the man all the more for leading him this long way for nothing.

Just when he passed between the two shanties, however, half a dozen toughs leaped upon him, from somewhere unseen, so quickly that he had no chance for defense.

Two had seized each arm, and all acting together, they ran him into the third one of the shanties.

There stood Mainard, his arms folded, smiling at him. He evidently had entered by the rear, as soon as he had disappeared around the corner of the rude building.

"Well, here you are," he observed, tauntingly, "and I will trouble you for that paper you have in your pocket."

"What paper?"

"The map that you have been puzzling your brain about."

That the man knew what he was talking about was evident, and Dick could not but wonder how he had come by the knowledge.

Then he recalled the note which had been received by Brandson, and thought at once of Maud Welle. He also recalled that her room in the hotel was next to his. This solved the problem.

CHAPTER XIX.

NABBY JANE'S NERVE.

Mainard did not stand to parley, but, advancing, thrust his hand into Dick's pocket.

As it happened, Dick had all his other letters and papers in the inner pocket of his vest.

The only thing in the inside pocket of his coat was the map, so the man had no trouble in bringing to light the object of his search, and he smiled as it was brought out.

"Easy done," he said.

"Yes, quite so," answered Dick. "Is that all you want of me?"

"That is all. You were a fool to think that I would call you away up here for the purpose of fighting you."

"If you will bid these gentlemen release me, I will prove to your satisfaction that I have not come here in vain. The wisest of men will do foolish things in the course of a lifetime."

"No, I hold no particular grudge against you, Mr. Peters, and what is the use of my whipping you for nothing?"

"How about that lump on your forehead?"

"This trick is satisfaction enough for that, and we will call it square."

"Well, have me released, then, since you have gained your object."

"You will be released only when I have found this fortune."

"Then you mean to keep me prisoner?"

"That is my intention, sir."

Dick's captors, having somewhat slackened their hold upon him, he gave a sudden leap forward, and would have struck Mainard to the floor with a single blow, but the hands tightened their hold upon him in time, and he was prevented.

"You find you cannot do it," the rascal taunted him.

"You will find that I can, perhaps, before you get done with me. This game is not ended yet."

"It is well under way, however, and I seem to hold both bowers and the joker, at present; ha, ha, ha! Well, take care of him, men."

"You bet we wull."

Mainard left the room by the front way, closing the door after him.

"Well, what do you propose doing with me?" Dick asked his captors, as soon as their leader was gone.

They were a fierce-looking gang, reminding Dick of a pack of hyenas.

"We aire goin' to make a prisoner of

ye, down hyer under this shanty, in ther sullen," one of them made answer.

"I have got a hundred dollars at the hotel to divide among you, if you will let me make my escape," Dick proposed. "No one will be any the wiser; you can say it was accidental."

They looked at one another, and shook their heads.

"Et won't do," declined their spokesman. "Thar' be too durn many of us, and ther boss would know we wuz lyin'. No, you have got ter stay hyer. Fetch him along, fellers."

The man jerked up a batten door in the floor as he spoke, disclosing a clumsy stairs.

He descended first, and the others followed, bearing Deadwood Dick by the arms and legs, a helpless prisoner.

Dick was disgusted, and blamed himself for having fallen into the trap so easily.

Once they were at the bottom, they proceeded to bind their prisoner with extreme care.

"We ain't goin' to 'low ye no chance ter give us ther slip," assured the spokesman. "Them's orders, and we mean to 'bey orders if we bu'st owners."

"I would like the satisfaction of taking you, one at a time, or even two, and bu'sting you," cried Dick, vengefully. "Just give me half a show and I will go for the whole pack of you."

"Talk is cheap," laughed the ruffian. "Mebby ye could do up one or two of us, after what we have seen of ye, but we ain't goin' to give ye the chance. Bind him good an' tight, boys, an' then we'll tie him to one of the timbers here so he can't possibly 'scape."

And they bound him accordingly.

When they had done they left him there and climbed up the rude stairs to the room above, closing down the trap door.

"I opine he wull keep down thar' all right," observed one of the fellows. "Come, now, and let's go and take a drink on top of et. That was about the slickest I ever seen."

All were ready to accept this suggestion, and the leader threw open the outer door.

But a surprise awaited them there.

The instant the door was thrown open, into the room stepped Nobby Nancy, with a brace of poppers in hand.

"Whoap!" cried the girl sport, as the men were ready to rush out. "Hold on a minute, my pretty hyenas!"

"What ther blazes!" cried the leader of the evil gang, as all stopped short and glared at the fearless girl as if they would devour her, their fists clenched and their mouths open.

"It will be blazes right out of these guns if you move a single peg!" the girl warned. "And, not only blazes, but bullets as well, and don't yer forget it!"

"What's ther matter, gal? What d'ye want?"

"I want my pard."

"Yer pard?"

"That was what I said. And you want to trot him out here in just the shortest time on record, if you don't want to pass in your chips. I am silk warp and all-wool filling, and I measure thirty-six inches to the yard; that is to say, I am the real stuff, and I mean shoot!"

"But, gal, we aire six to one against ye!"

"I don't care if you are a dozen! Do you hear what I ordered? Produce my pard or I'll begin to peg away!"

They glared like the human wolves they were, and seemed as if ready to defy the plucky girl's weapons and spring upon

her, but their dread of dire results deterred them from acting in that manner.

"We'll chaw ye all up!" the ringleader threatened. "Git out of ther way, thar'!" he bellowed, trying to frighten her. "By ther howlin' hurlykanes! we'll walk right over ye, an' knock yer beauty into a cocked hat! Git out of hyer, blast ye, or by ther—"

Crack!

One of the girl's revolvers spoke, and one of the ruffians dropped to the floor with a bullet in his neck.

At this the rest recoiled, and the loud-mouthed leader turned as pale as death. He had fooled himself with the idea that the girl sport did not mean it, or that she would not have the nerve to carry out the threat; now he found that she was "silk warp and all-wool filling."

CHAPTER XX.

KNOW HOW IT WOULD BE.

The man Nobby Nancy had plunked was the foremost of the tough lot—a grim, gaunt, ghastly-looking specimen, whom rum and disease together had made hideous.

Her bullet had probably only forestalled death by "natural causes" a very short time; but, that was no matter; she was as ready to serve the leader of the lot in the same manner.

"What are you going to do about it?" she demanded, in a clear, ringing tone. "You see I mean business, and I have got more than enough pills here for the whole lot of you. Bring out my pard or I'll upset some other man's apple-cart for him, you bet!"

"Hold on! Don't shoot no more!" cried the ringleader, cowed. "We'll fetch him, double quick!"

"See that you do, then! Bring him out, and if he has been harmed I'll wipe out this nest in short order."

"He is all right; we ain't harmed a hair of his head."

"So much the better for you."

"Come on, boys; and we'll git him!"

"Hold on!" cried the girl sport. "One of you can bring him; I will take care of the rest until he is produced, safe and sound."

"You are durn p'tic'lar!"

"Yes, and it pays to be with such a gang. Bring him out, if you don't want another subject for planting!"

"All right, all right; don't shoot no more, and I will have him up hyer in jest two jerks of a jiffy, you bet! You means business, you does, and we ain't sech fools we don't know et."

The fellow had jerked up the trap in the floor while speaking.

Only for the fact that they had left Dick gagged, Nancy would have heard from him ere this.

The man was on the point of going down, when the girl thought of a trick he might attempt to play, and ordered him to drop his weapons on the floor before he left the room.

With muttered oaths he obeyed.

Having placed his weapons on the floor, he went down, and in a few moments Deadwood Dick came forth, a free man.

He, too, had a brace of guns in hand, ready for business, and as soon as he was out of the hole he ordered the men to go down the steps, every mother's son of them!

And they had to obey, or fare worse.

Dick then fastened the trap upon them; and that done, he offered his hand to his noble girl pard.

"You are a dandy, Nancy Jane!" he cried. "You have got more nerve than the average man, and I am proud of

you. Now we'll see who will come out on top in this game, I think."

"And has Mainard got your paper?"

"Yes; but he won't keep it long."

"Can you take it away from him?"

"You come along with me, and see, little pard," was the rejoinder.

They left the shanty, closing the door after them, and returned to the hotel by a rear way.

Entering at a rear door, they sauntered out upon the piazza as if they had just got up for the day, and had stepped out for a breath of morning air.

As it happened, who should be standing near, on the walk at the foot of the steps, but Sanford Mainard and Stuttering Samson.

Both looked up as the door opened.

Mainard's face paled, and his hand flew to his hip.

Quicker than he, however, Deadwood Dick's guns had him covered.

"Don't try that game, if you value good health," was the grim warning.

Advancing as he spoke, he descended the steps and faced the two men.

"Now, if you please, I will take charge of that paper again."

"What paper?" blustered Mainard.

"Hand that paper over, or down you go! No quarter now!"

"Maybe you think you can take it away from me."

"Easy enough to take it away from a dead man."

"Only a coward would speak that way!"

"Do you want me to take it from you living?"

"I would like to see you do that same!"

"All right. Let my pard here take your weapons; or, better still, let your stuttering friend here take them, and I will hand mine to my pard. That done, I will have that paper so quick it will make you dizzy, you chief of scalawags!"

"I'll do that, by Judas!"

"All right, act on it, then."

Mainard gave Stuttering Samson his weapons, and Dick handed his own to Nancy Jane, when he instantly advanced upon Mainard, his eyes flashing ominously.

The manager of the Odeon tried to parry his attack, and for a few seconds did so, but he soon got a "snifter" that fairly lifted him clear off the ground.

Down he went, flat upon his back. Dick was upon him in an instant, and had fished the paper out of his pocket before the fellow knew what had happened.

Then he was up again in an instant.

Mainard scrambled to his feet, boiling over with rage.

"I have the paper again. If you have got enough of this thing, say so; if not, I am yours to command!"

"Curse you! I will give you enough," was the retort.

The man made a rush at Dick, as if to annihilate him on the spot, but his rage made the victory all the easier for the steel-nerved detective.

He played with the manager for a time, just to enrage him the more; then went suddenly at him, and, as some of the witnesses remarked, "he just made the fur fly!"

Right and left he struck, every blow telling with terrible effect, and in less than one half minute Mainard was on his back again, completely knocked out, and cowed, for he was bellowing "Enough! enough!"

"He has g-g-g-g-got p-p-p-p-plenty," stuttered Samson, "and he would b-b-be a h-h-hog if he ha-ha-ha-ha-hadn't s-s-sense enough to s-s-say so!"

"Well, it is to be hoped that he is fully satisfied with this lesson; if I have to give him another his beauty will be gone forever!"

"I t-t-t-told him h-h-h-how it w-w-w-would b-b-be," the stuttering fellow declared. "I n-n-n-knewed you k-k-k-k-could do it, b-b-by the w-w-way you d-d-d-did it t-to m-m-m-me. And I'm g-g-g-g-glad of it, b'g-g-g-g-gosh!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AVENGED.

About that time John Ormsted was out looking for his friend.

It had been a surprise to him to wake up in his room and find himself all dressed, and his partner missing.

He asked Dick if he had seen him.

"Not this morning. Is he missing?"

"Yes; can't find him anywheres."

"Maybe he has taken an early start to find that fortune; but, as I have the map I can't think that."

"I say, what happened to us last night? The last I remember we were in your room, and when I woke up it was morning and the sun was shining in my face where I lay on the floor."

"Fact was, I suppose, we took a little too much," explained Dick, laughing. "Our pard will show up all right, I don't doubt."

They had breakfast, yet Blaker was still missing.

Some time before the opening hour, the president and cashier of the bank entered the building.

A few minutes later Deadwood Dick and Nancy Jane crossed the street and entered after them. The door was closed, and observers wondered what was going on.

The watchman was still there, and he looked troubled.

"Have you heard the fellow?" asked Dick.

"The watchman says he has," answered Rashton. "About two hours ago he heard terrible cries, faintly, and they were kept up for some time, but now all is still."

"We will go down, then, and take the man's confession, if he is ready to make one; and I think he will be, when we threaten to leave him there to meet the same doom as the man he murdered."

"And I am to go down first," reminded Nancy Jane.

"Yes, you first."

They proceeded to the cellar, two carrying lights, and the trap in the lower floor was lifted.

No sound came from below.

Nancy Jane was very pale, but firm.

"Do you still insist upon being the first to go down?" asked Dick.

"Yes," she resolutely answered. "I will go down first. It is my right. I am not afraid."

She leaped lightly down, and one of the lights was handed to her.

She disappeared, and then was heard to exclaim:

"My God!"

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"Come down! Come down at once!" she called.

Dick and the other sprang down, and immediately saw for themselves.

The man was dead; and, not only dead, but his hair had turned as white as snow, while his face had an expression of utter horror!

"More terrible than I thought it would be," remarked Dick. "Gully, he could not stand the ordeal. We have lost his confession, but your vengeance ought to feel fully satisfied, Nancy Jane."

"I am satisfied; he deserved no less. What he did unto others, the same was meted out to him. That is the golden rule of human vengeance!"

"And what about the other?" asked the banker.

"Wait, and I will bring him here," and Deadwood Dick hurriedly departed.

He found the man in the bar-room of the hotel—his usual resort.

"I have found our pard," announced Dick, "and he has found the fortune!"

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, and you are to come with me. Don't be excited, so as to attract attention."

They crossed the street, but did not head straight for the bank at once. Once across, however, Dick turned in the direction of the bank, and stopped at the steps. The man had turned as pale as a ghost.

"Not in there!" he cried. "Oh, not in there, Mr. Peters."

"And why not?" Dick demanded.

"You mean to say he is in there? Impossible! You couldn't hire him to go in that place!"

"Oh, come on with you, and don't draw a crowd by your fooling!" urged the other.

Still the fellow did not seem inclined to go into the bank, but with a quick movement Dick laid hold upon his collar and, exerting his marvelous strength, forced him up the steps and in at the door in a hurry.

There he handcuffed him before the astounded man knew what had happened.

"I cavel I cavel" he whined, piteously, dropping upon his knees. "I will do anything you say, anything; only don't take me down there—don't!"

"Will you confess everything?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, yes, everything!"

"Well, we will hear what you have to say, and if it agrees with the confession of your partner, well and good; if not, down you go to share the fate of the victim of your horrible crime."

Perspiration was streaming from the fellow's face, and Dick was really afraid to take him down to the hole below, for fear he might die of abject terror.

Dick called down to the others, and all came up.

Then the villain confessed, swearing that his confession was full and true.

He had been one of the former partners in the banking business there, at Flush Flats. His real name was Gus Osburn. Eugene Brandson had made friends with him, and had gotten him into his power.

Having done that, he forced an interest in the business, and the three—the third partner was dead, had begun to carry on a business that was chiefly wholesale robbery of every man whom they saw a chance to fleece at all. And in that manner they prospered.

One day Theodore Barefield came to them, saying he had a fortune which he wanted to put into safe hands until he could reach home, when he would deposit the amount in some bank in his own city by draft. They agreed to take it, but, just then, Brandson came in. He and Barefield, recognizing each other, Brandson drew a pistol and made his rival a prisoner.

The confederates in villainy then decided to chain him in the cellar, to make him confess where the fortune was hid, for he had not brought it with him, so the fellow explained; but he averred that they had no intention of killing Barefield, who died a natural death; and then, in order to save themselves, they closed up the business in a hurry and went away.

The confession was not believed; it was certain that Brandson had left his prisoner to die there of starvation; the scoundrel simply dared not tell the truth as to the death of their victim.

The confession made, Osburn was sent to jail; then, from the steps of the bank, the mayor made known to the people the whole matter, and formally introduced Mr. Richard Bristol—the noted Deadwood Dick, and the Simon Pure Detective.

The citizens of Flush Flats shouted themselves hoarse in their hearty enthusiasm. The whole revelation was an astonisher, and Deadwood Dick was the hero of the hour.

What remains must be briefly told.

The skeleton of the murdered man was properly interred, and a shaft set up to mark the spot.

The fortune was discovered in due time by Deadwood Dick, after a patient search, and it was handed over to Nancy Jane, his girl sport pard. She, in turn, eventually gave it to a sister of Barefield's, as his next of kin.

The well-satisfied mayor made a public dinner, in honor of Deadwood Dick, and it was a big affair. There, again, the whole story was retold, and at the close there were three rousing cheers for Simon Pure, the Peculiar, and his Nobby Girl Pard.

When Dick left the place Nancy Jane went with him, declaring that she wanted to share with him the perils and excitement of at least one more adventure before she set her face homeward and settled down again to humdrum life, as she characterized it.

As for Maud Weille, she married Mainard and took up her residence at Flush Flats, permanently.

Of the others nothing further need be written.

THE END.

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